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AUTHOR Stokes, Lillian G.
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ABSTRACT

The role of associate degree nursing (ADN) programs has changed dramatically in their 30 years of existence. The number of ADN graduates increased from 260 in 1954 to 36,434 in 1980, and 47.8% of all nursing graduates in 1980 came from ADN programs, as compared to 0.9% in 1954. These graduates have the best record of employment five years after graduation of any nursing graduates and tend to obtain work and remain within their community. An ADN graduate is a nurse who is prepared in two years to provide direct patient care, and his/her current role as a provider of care, communicator, teacher, manager, and member of the nursing profession can be contrasted with earlier and less specifically defined roles, especially in terms of assistance, supervision, and evaluation of nursing care. The ADN graduate can best be utilized in the provision of direct patient care, which is the heart of nursing practice. In the future development of ADN programs, educators should not lose sight of the primary goal of such programs, that is, to prepare sensitive, caring technicians who are skilled and competent in providing patient care. Nursing service administrators should promote the development of ADN programs through the provision of structured orientation and through support of continuing education opportunities for ADN graduates. (HB)

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Role Preparation of Associate Degree Graduates

By: Lillian G. Stokes

Paper prepared for the Associate Degree in Nursing Celebration

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JC 820 173

Role Preparation of Associate Degree Graduates

This is indeed a celebration - a day that we who have been close to Associate Degree Nursing have set aside to reminisce. If you would think for a moment what one may reminisce about during any celebration, undoubtedly you will think of the good things that have happened, the funny things, the joys, and perhaps the problems and frustrations. But even thoughts of problems and frustrations tend to take on a different meaning during a time of celebration.

Anyone who has been involved with Associate Degree Nursing can well provide answers to questions such as: What is an An Associate Degree Graduate? What can this graduate do? and How can this graduate be best utilized? Since this is a celebration, you won't mind listening for approximately 15 minutes as we, "together", reminisce about this graduate as these questions are answered.

Question Number 1 - What is an Associate Degree Graduate? In answering this question, let's give consideration to - who were these graduates? and who are these graduates?

The Associate Degree movement which began in 1952, represented a major change in nursing education. The first of these graduates, 260 of them, were graduated in 1954. In preparation for this presentation, I found a brochure which was prepared by WICHE in 1968. The brochure is entitled - The Graduate of Associate Degree Nursing Programs: WHO IS THIS NURSE? According to this publication, this graduate "is a nurse who is prepared in two years to provide direct patient care". (15) The ability of graduates to perform direct care functions has been demonstrated in follow-up reports.

As we reminisce about who these graduates are, shall we take a look at the employment of these graduates which should shed some light on the graduates you have so deliberately prepared. These graduates constitute a significant proportion of the work force in nursing, and consequently have had a significant impact on the delivery of health care: starting out with 260 graduates in 1954, steadily increasing to 1,962 in 1964; 28,919 in 1974, and 36,434 in 1980. (7) According to the National League for Nursing, these figures represented 0.9% of all registered nurse graduates in 1954, and 47.8% of graduates in 1980. (7) The totals for these 30 years represent well over 300,000 graduates, or exactly 344,808 graduates. In Indiana, though figures are incomplete, the numbers of associate degree graduates nearly follow a similar pattern. State Board data show in 1969-1970, 371 associate degree graduates joined the ranks; in 1976-1977 1,011 graduates; 1977-1978 1,324 and 1978-1979 - 996.

In addition to numbers, these graduates, according to the Career Pattern Study published in 1975, have the best record of employment 5 years after graduation. For example, the study indicated that 5 years after graduation 75.1% of Associate Degree graduates were working as compared to 68.1% Diploma graduates, and 62% of the Baccalaureate graduates. This study also indicated that 61% of Associate Degree graduates worked 8 out of 10 years. Eighty-four percent (84%) felt satisfied that nursing met their expectations for personal satisfaction, and a fourth of these graduates were working on or had completed a Baccalaureate degree. (10)

A final comment about these graduates, they tend to obtain positions in their community of residence and the majority remain in their community. These graduates practice nursing in acute and extended care facilities including hospitals, clinics and other agencies.

Question Number 2 - What can this graduate do? If you would historically think of the frameworks that have been utilized to organize the content and skills to prepare these graduates, you will surely note changes. And certainly the descriptions that have been used to describe these roles have varied. For example, during the early years of Associate Degree Nursing, Montag listed the Associate Degree graduates' functions as being: 1) to assist in the planning of nursing care for patients; 2) to give general nursing care with supervision, and 3) to assist in the evaluation of the nursing care given. (13)

More recently the entry level competencies of the Associate Degree Nurse were outlined by the Council of Associate Degree Programs of the National League for Nursing. (3) This document outlines the roles of this graduate as being more specific than those previously mentioned. The current expectations include knowledge and skill related to the assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation of nursing problems with physiological, social and psychological bases. More specifically this document outlines five interrelated roles to guide the practice of these graduates. These roles are provider of care, communicator, teacher, manager and member within the profession of nursing. (3)

As a provider of care, this graduate utilizes problem solving, or the nursing process: assessing, planning, implementing and evaluating, to formulate and maintain individualized nursing care plans.

As a communicator, this graduate utilizes techniques of interpersonal skills to obtain data, implement and evaluate care.

As a client teacher, this graduate utilizes the nursing process to determine situations in which the patient needs information and support,

and as a result, establishes short and long range goals relevant to the patient's diagnosis; implements individualized teaching plans, and evaluates the effectiveness of the client's learning.

As a manager of client care, this graduate establishes nursing diagnoses and provides nursing care by implementing nursing care plans in accordance with priority needs.

As a member within the profession of nursing, this graduate, among other things is accountable for his or her nursing practice, practices within the nursing's ethical and legal framework, and assumes responsibility for self-development. Inherent within each of these descriptive roles is direct patient care, which is the heart of nursing practice; and again the single purpose on which Associate Degree Nursing was founded.

Question Number 3 - How can this graduate be best utilized? Again, the WICHE publication indicated that the aim of Associate Degree Education is "to prepare a practitioner who, in the beginning is ready to render quality nursing care to people. This practitioner is not prepared through the educational program to assume administrative responsibilities." (15) In providing direct patient care, the Associate Degree graduate is capable of performing a wide range of activities ranging from simple and routine to complex, and the care that is provided is directed toward individuals with common well defined health problems.

My thoughts about the future is that there is a place for this nurse. The graduate that we have known for 30 years will in the future, as so clearly stated by Blakeney "continue to plan and give direct, immediate care to patients, assist in long range planning for patient care, and assist in evaluating the results and efficacy of the care rendered." (2) Scientific

research and technological research will increase the knowledge base of nursing which will inevitably result in changes in the content of these programs as well as result in modifications in competencies for nursing practice. However these changes and modifications should not change the goal of Associate Degree Education in nursing - that being to prepare the nurse who can provide direct care. To attempt anything different or additional would jeopardize this basic goal.

In closing, the work of these graduates is both valuable and necessary. The work record of these graduates is outstanding. These graduates add to the working force of registered nurses. We have these and other records of which we are proud. However these graduates, not unlike other graduates, are generally overwhelmed by the tremendous responsibility that confront them as they leave the security of their school and embark upon a new career. Therefore in closing I would like to offer a challenge for nursing education and nursing service.

To the educators - "do not try to be all things to all people." As you go about curricula changes, don't loose sight of the primary mission and goal of the Associate Degree Program - to prepare as stated by Kramer warm, sensitive, caring nursing technicians who are skilled and competent in the care giver function." (10) As you prepare these graduates, select appropriate content, design appropriate learning experiences, and present appropriate roles to your students. This will facilitate their having a clear idea of their roles, and they consequently can be better able to clarify these roles in their work settings.

It is obvious that "no program, whatever its purpose or length, prepares anyone completely and for ever for anything". (14) Therefore to nursing service - provide structured orientation, and provide continuing education, or

support opportunities for continuing education. All that most of these graduates need is the opportunity to develop experience in some form of structured guidance. They are not educated to run the nursing unit - they will do so in time. The new graduate will become self reliant after a program of orientation, comradeship with others, orderly progression toward independent proficiency, self esteem and cooperation.

And last the associate degree program is distinguished for its systematic plan for development, implementation, and evaluation. It was the first program to be planned deliberately. It was the first program to begin by experimentation - let's keep it alive another 30 x 30 years.

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